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Author(s): Roberto Dan

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Inside the Empire: Some Remarks on the Urartian and Achaemenid Presence in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan*

Roberto Dan

ISMEO, Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente

Abstract

The goal of the present paper is to evaluate the plausibility of possible Urartian or Achaemenid presence in the territory of the present-day Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan. The area has been considered in relation to other neighbouring regions located in the Araxes valley, with a particular focus on the site of Oğlan Qala, the most important regional settlement. This has been the subject of recent archaeological investigations that have in fact yielded conclusive evidence of Urartian presence in this region. However, there is currently no reliable evidence of a Persian occupation of the area.

Keywords

Nakhchivan Archaeology, Oğlan Qala, Urartu, Achaemenids, Azerbaijan (Iran)

The development in recent years of systematic archaeological investigations in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan has begun to shed light on an area hitherto regarded as a *terra incognita* of Ancient Near Eastern archaeology (Schachner 2001: 310- 321). The aim of this paper is to evaluate the plausibility of possible Urartian and Achaemenid occupation of this territory, on the basis of recent epigraphic and archaeological discoveries concerning Nakhchivan.

Nakhchivan is an exclave of the Azerbaijan Republic, of which it constitutes an autonomous region, sharing borders with Armenia, Turkey

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and Iran (Ristvet et al. 2011: 2-3). The main geographical boundaries are the mountainous regions of southern Armenia (of which it is a natural extension) to the north and the River Araxes to the south, which constitutes the entire border with Iran. Overall, it covers an area of about 5,500 km² (Ristvet et al. 2011: 2), with a predominantly mountainous landscape and two major plains, those of Şərur and Nakhchivan, which have always been the most densely occupied zones.

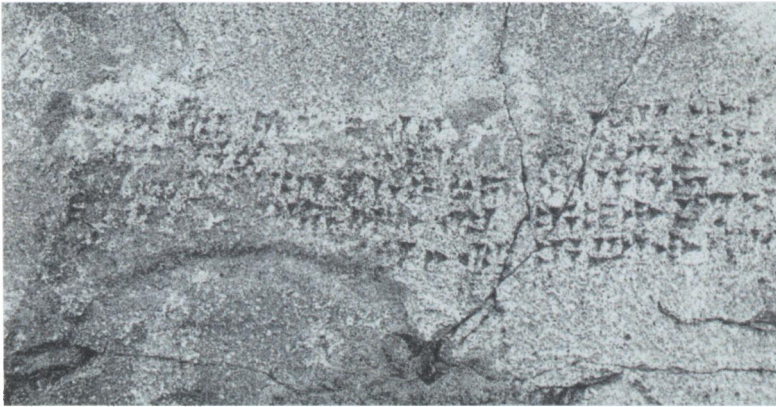


Fig. 1. The Urartian Inscription from Ojasar-Ilandagh in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan (after Salvini 1998: abb. 1).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The first archaeological work in Nakhchivan was conducted by Russian scholars in 1896, in particular N. V. Fedorov, who investigated the necropolis of Kızılbank/Kızılburun (Bahşaliev 1997: 92), the finds from which were later published in Moscow by A. A. Spicyn (Nikitin 1882; Spicyn 1909). Systematic excavations of some importance did not start until the Soviet period, when extensive archaeological excavations were carried out throughout the Caucasus. These included the small excavations in 1926 performed by the group of I. I. Meshchaninov, A. A. Miller, and A. K. Alekperov in a number of Bronze and Iron Age sites (Bahşaliev 1997: 92), but above all the investigations at Kültəpə 1 conducted by O. H. Abibullaev between 1951 and 1964; later (from 1968 onwards) Abibullaev and V. H. Aliev also excavated at Kültəpə 2 (Abibullaev 1982; Aliev 1991). Both latter sites provided important information on the prehistory of Nakhchivan. Between 1975 and 1990 the excavations of K. M. Aslanov in Harababa-Gi-

lan brought to light significant Bronze and Iron Age remains—as also happened during the 1970s in the cemetery and fortress of Şahtaxtı in excavations conducted by K. M. Aslanov and K. M. Aghayev (Bahşaliev 1997: 92-93).

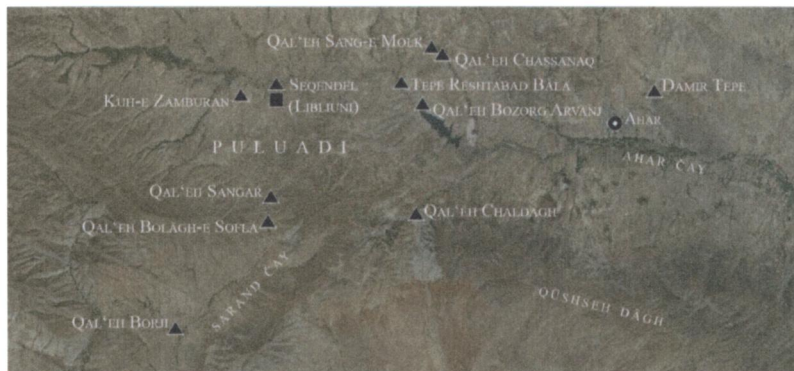


Fig. 2. The Region of Puluadi during the Middle Iron Age: Urartian Sites and Inscriptions in the Ahar Çay and Sarand Çay Valleys (from Dan 2012: fig. IV.58.2).

In the 1980s, further excavations were conducted by A. G. Ashurov at the Early Bronze Age sites of Maxta 1 and Qarabulaq (Aşurov 1988; Aşurov 2002; Aşurov 2003), by V. B. Bahşaliev at the Iron Age sites of Oğlan Qala and Kolanı (Bahşaliev 1994), and by E. K. Caferov between 1988 and 1989 at the Kazma quarry—which yielded important evidence regarding the Palaeolithic (Zeynalov 2010: 22-29).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union most of the excavations were interrupted¹ and only limited surface surveys were performed in the following years, such as that conducted by Oktay Belli (Belli/Bahşaliev 2001; Belli/Sevin 1999), together with some excavations by S. Ashurov in 2001 and 2002 (Aşurov 2003).

2006 saw the inauguration of one of the largest and most systematic archaeological projects ever conducted in Nakhchivan, which began with the excavations at Ovçulartəpəsi by C. Marro and S. Aşurov, followed by a survey conducted by Bahşaliev (Ristvet et al. 2011: 5-10), which included trenches at the sites of Kültəpə 2 and Maxta 1, dug to verify the stratigraphic sequences (Ristvet et al. 2011: 10-15). Since 2008, as part of the

¹ Although excavations continued between 1990 and 1994 in some Iron Age cemeteries: Haqqıxlıq, Muncuqlutəpə, Sarıdərə (Bahşaliev 2002: 106-120; Aslanov/Kaşkaj 1991: 221-233).

same project, excavations have been carried out at the great fortress of Oğlan Qala, a key site for understanding the Iron Age in the region (Ristvet et al. 2012: 321-362).

THE URARTIAN INSCRIPTION OF OJASAR-ILANDAGH: SOME HISTORICAL REMARKS

As early as 1985, Paul Zimansky had suggested, on the basis of a study of the general characteristics of the region, the possibility of an Urartian presence in the Nakhchivan region (Zimansky 1985: 23). Years later, this intuition was confirmed by the discovery of an inscription at Ojasar-Ilandagh (CTU A 3-8; fig. 6); to date this remains the only epigraphic testimony that the Urartians penetrated this region. The text, by Išpuini and Minua, reads as follows (fig. 1): "Thanks to the power of Țaldi Išpuini, the son of Sarduri, (and) Minua, the son of Išpuini, have conquered the city of Arşini, have occupied the country of the city of Arşini, has conquered the region of the city of Aniani and has destroyed [...] was [...]. He has installed a stele for god Țaldi. In the country of Puluadi he placed as a ritual: [an ox] to Țaldi to sacrifice, a cow to the bride of Țaldi of the country of P[uluadi(?)]" (Salvini 2008, vol. 1: 137).²

If we accept the identification of the country of Puluadi as corresponding to the region of Ahar (fig. 2) in the Iranian province of East Azerbaijan (Salvini 2006: 112), on the basis of the place of discovery of the Seqendel inscription (CTU A 9-8), commissioned by Sarduri II after the conquest of that region, it may be deduced that the country of the city of Arşini and the region of the city of Aniani were located in an area between the plains of Nakhchivan and Ahar, most likely on the course of the Araxes.³

In fact, the Urartians left no inscriptions in the places referred to in the inscription, but did so along the roads that led to these places; according to the sequence of events described, Puluadi would have been the last leg of the expedition, after the conquest of the other places mentioned in the text. We must remember that the country of the city of Arşini and the re-

² Translated by Salvini in Italian, the English version is mine. There are, however, many uncertainties that preclude a definitive understanding of the text.

³ This consideration stems from the considerable difficulty of crossing the mountains of Zangezur to arrive at Ahar, if it is assumed that the country of the city of Arşini and the region of the city of Aniani were in the Syunik region of Armenia.

gion of the city of Aniani were unknown before the discovery of this inscription (Salvini 1998: 96).

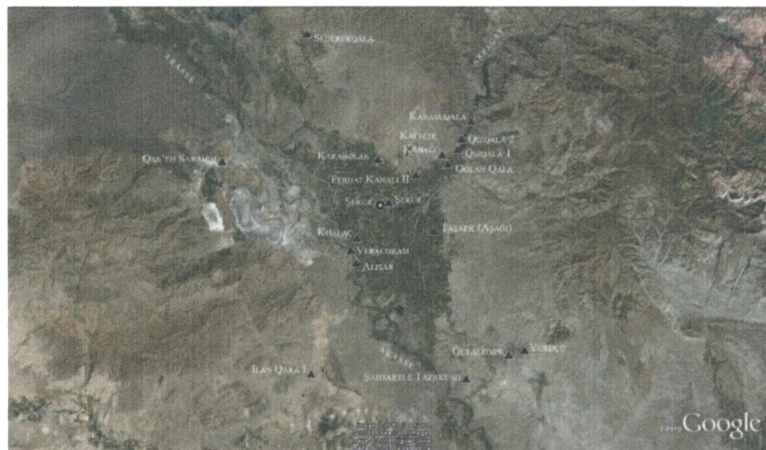


Fig. 3. Middle Iron Age/Urartian Archaeological Sites in the Araxes Valley
(Serur Plain in Nakhchivan and Verahram in Azerbaijan; from Dan 2012: fig. IV.41.1).

This evidence of the ancient occupation of an eastern region (Ahar) is a matter of considerable interest, demonstrating how—already at the end of the 9th century B.C.—large parts of north-western Iran had permanently entered into the Urartian political sphere; it is difficult to imagine that the Puluadi mentioned in the Ojasar-Ilandagh inscription is not the same as that cited in the later inscription of Seqendel (fig. 2).⁴

MIDDLE IRON AGE/URARTIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS IN THE ARAXES VALLEY

At this point, to evaluate the possible Urartian presence in Nakhchivan, we must assess the archaeological remains known in the regions of Shahrur, Sadarak, Nakhchivan, Ordubad along the Araxes river, which belong to the Middle Iron Age, i.e. the period of development of the Kingdom of Urartu. In the following assessment of the region during this historical period, the area of Verahram (in Azerbaijan (Iran), on the opposite side of the Araxes) is also taken into consideration, for reasons that will be discussed later.

⁴ We must remember that the name Puluadi is reconstructed by means of integration; the name might, therefore, really be another.

The plain of Sherur is located in the northern area of the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, and is the site of the homonymous capital city of the province. This area is mountainous and well-supplied with water. The plain is located at an altitude of about 800 metres above sea level and is bordered to the east by imposing mountain formations and to the west by the middle course of the Araxes, which is also the western border with the modern Iranian province of East Azerbaijan. The area measures 30 km in a NW-SE direction and 15 km E-W, covering 23,000 ha, and is crossed by the River Arpachay, which flows into the Araxes.



Fig. 4. Fragmentary Bronze Belt discovered between Şahtaxtı and Tazakend (from Bahşaliev 1997: fig. 26).

Here were identified a total of ten archaeological sites with Middle Iron Age occupation deposits: the settlement of Gulaltepe, the cemeteries⁵ of Karabulak, Aşağı Taşark, Khalaç, Yurdçu and Şahtaxtı, and Tazakend⁶ and the fortresses of Karasuqala,⁷ Qizqala 1, Qizqala 2, and Oğlan

⁵ Among them we must include a probably still unpublished cemetery in the vicinity of the city of Sherur, from which came a stamp seal that would appear to be clearly of Urartian manufacture (Bahşaliev 1997: 117; Bahşaliev/Marro 2009: 29-30).

⁶ Recently, there were found, about halfway between the villages of Şahtaxtı and Tazakend (presumably by local inhabitants, near the necropolis), the remains of a bronze belt that closely resembled Urartian types (Bahşaliev 1997: 117; Bahşaliev/Marro 2009: 30). It bears a decoration composed of two mythical creatures, horned griffons, alternating with horsemen; in between there is an eagle with the head of a man in his beak. The

Qala. These sites are characterised by the presence of local Middle Iron Age pottery, local imitations of Urartian pottery⁸ and genuine Biainili ceramics, for example, at Oğlan Qala (Ristvet 2012: 344-345, fig. 18-19).



Fig. 5. Oğlan Qala. Topographical Map of the Fortress Showing the Areas Investigated during the 2008 and 2009 Excavations (from Risvet et al. 2012: 331, fig. 5).

It is interesting to note the confirmation of a trend well attested in all the areas that were part of Urartu, which is a significant increase during the Early and Middle Iron Age of the number of sites compared to the immediately preceding periods (Risvet et al. 2011: 8).

decapitated body is shown on the right extremity of the belt, followed by other partial but unrecognisable images. Among these groups of figures there are circular space-filling motifs, while the decorations are bounded by two continuous horizontal lines, one above and the other below. On the basis of its decoration this belt can be attributed to Kellner's Group IV.

⁷ It seems that just north of this site are located two other unpublished fortresses, probably chronologically contemporary with it (Parker et al. 2011: 195).

⁸ Discovered in practically all of these sites (Parker et al. 2011: 189).

Judging from its size and position, the control centre of this region would certainly have been the great fortress of Oğlan Qala (fig. 5). The fort was built on a hill known as Qaratəpə, in the north-eastern part of the Sharur plain. Archaeological excavations have shown the presence of three Iron Age occupation phases dating to the Early Iron Age (Period V, 1200-800 B.C.), Middle Iron Age (Period IV, 800-600 B.C.)⁹ and Late Iron Age (Period III, 500-200 B.C.) (Ristvet 2012: 327, 329).



Fig. 6. Fragments of Urartian *pithoi* with Inscribed Cuneiform and Hieroglyphics (from Ristvet et al. 2012, fig. 18).

With regard to the historical interpretation of the fortress, the presence of established Early Iron Age layers does not exclude the possibility that this centre might correspond to the city of Aniani or that of Arşini, mentioned in the inscription of Išpuini and Minua. The attribution of a phase of the complex to the Middle Iron Age in particular needs further investigation.

The excavators of the site have recently argued that: “It is still uncertain whether Oğlanqala was incorporated into Urartu, and, if so, when this may have happened. At Oğlanqala, finds of cuneiform-inscribed pithos fragments on the citadel show local use of writing—not simply the importation of inscribed artifacts from elsewhere, as these jars would have been constructed in place. [...] Yet characteristic Urartian architec-

⁹ Bahşaliev/Marro (2009: 29) also identified three levels of occupation during the Iron Age: 9th/8th, 8th/7th and 7th/6th centuries.

tural features—ashlar masonry, regular buttressing, wall footings, and staircases carved from the living rock—appear to be entirely absent from both the citadel and the standing fortifications at the site. Moreover, the alignment of the fortification walls is not starkly geometric like that of their Urartian counterparts but, like Early Iron Age examples, instead follows the natural topography of the hill” (Ristvet et al. 2012: 356).

A careful analysis of the evidence submitted by the excavators suggests that it does not preclude Urartian origins for the fortress, which would rather seem to be well established.¹⁰ Indeed the masonry techniques are closely similar to those of Bastam, Ayanis and Hasanlu¹¹ (IIIb) and the absence of features, such as rusticated masonry,¹² regular buttresses or rock-cut stairs is common to many fortresses considered as certainly Urartian. Many Urartian fortresses also possess irregular shapes, with walls that fit the lie of the land, a characteristic found in many Urartian fortifications.

But it is above all the recent discovery during excavations of Biainili pottery, in particular some fragments of *pithoi* (fig. 6) with cuneiform inscriptions and jars with hieroglyphic signs identical to those found in Ayanis and Bastam, which must date to the 7th century (Risvet et al. 2008: 192-193, fig. 11-13; Risvet et al. 2012: 345, fig. 18-19),¹³ that constitutes the final

¹⁰ This dating was hotly debated; a statement posted on the official website of the Nakhchivan Archaeological Project at the University of Pennsylvania, but no longer present, firmly opposed reports circulating in Armenia about the possibility that the site might have had a Urartian phase: “*There have been reports in the Armenian media that the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the Naxçivan Archaeological project have supplied information that Oğlanqala is an Urartian and hence Armenian site. These reports are false. We have never provided such information, nor does it conform with our interpretation of the site. There is growing evidence that Oğlanqala was not an Urartian city. Architectural details, the layout of this complex and the distinctive pottery found here indicate that Oğlanqala was the capital of a small, local kingdom, probably centered on the Sharur Plains. Our official interpretation of the excavations at Oğlanqala is presented on this website, www.oglanqala.net*”.

¹¹ As argued also by the excavators themselves (http://www.oglanqala.net/2008_ironpalace.html).

¹² The use of *ashlar* masonry in Urartian architecture seems to have been restricted to the 7th century B.C. (Dan, forthcoming).

¹³ http://www.oglanqala.net/2008_Introduction.html; http://www.oglanqala.net/2008_ironpalace.html. The dating of the site to the Urartian period was also confirmed to Raffaele Biscione and Mirjo Salvini by Stephan Kroll, and was based on pottery studies.

proof of Urartian occupation of the site—and, therefore, of the entire plain. Oğlan Qala was certainly a very important border fortress for Urartu, if we consider that the approximate length of the perimeter of its fortifications, estimated at approximately 1400 metres, makes it the thirteenth-largest fortress with regard to the total length of the fortified perimeter in the whole Urartian Kingdom (Biscione/Dan, forthcoming).



Fig. 7. Middle Iron Age/Urartian Archaeological Sites in the Araxes Valley (plains of Nakhchivan and Ordubad in Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan (Iran); from Dan 2012: fig. IV.41.3).

This system of fortifications recently identified in the Oğlan Qala area seems an integral part of the Urartian control system; the forts along the course of the Arpachay (Qizqala 1, Qizqala 2, Karasuqala and the two fortresses on the border with Armenia) controlled the defence of the fortress on that side and, thus, one of the access roads (fig. 3) to Lake Sevan (Parker et al. 2011: 195).

The system of agricultural exploitation of the plains would have been supplied by two hydraulic works, generally dated to the 7th century B.C., which were also discovered in recent years; these are the artificial canals known as Ferhat Kanalı II, 25-30 km long, and the Kalecik Kanalı, 5.5-6 km long. These, therefore, date to Urartian times and are considered part of the irrigation system directly controlled by Oğlan Qala (Belli 2001a: 361; Belli 2001b: 415).

The region of the Sharur plain and the small adjacent plains, in addition to its agricultural importance during the Urartian era, must have been strategically fundamental for the control of communication routes. To the west, beyond the Araxes, it was possible to reach the plain of Ve-

rahram, which was a junction giving access southward to the plain of Maku and northward to the plains of Iğdır and Karakoyunlu; to the south it was possible, beyond the plains of Nakhchivan (where no Urartian remains are currently known except for the previously mentioned inscription of Išpuini and Minua) to reach the small plain of the Ordubad and Syunik region; to the north along the course of Araxes, past the fort of Sederekqala, the plain of Yerevan could be reached, while to the west, following the Arpachay along a road protected by forts,¹⁴ it was possible to reach at the area of Yeghegnadzor, which gave northward access, through the Selim Pass, to the southern shore of Sevan, and southward access to the River Vorotan valley.

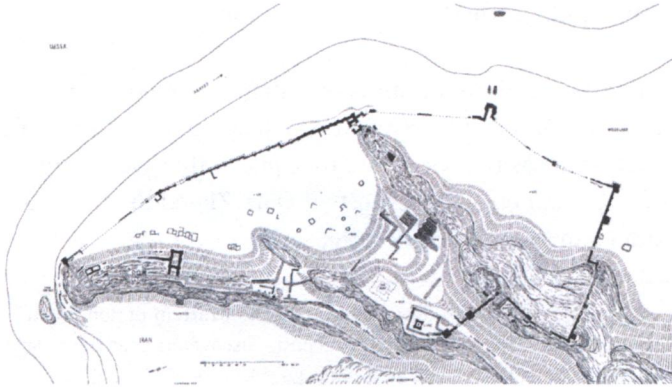


Fig. 8. Verahram: Topographical Map of the Fortress (from Kleiss 1974: tav. 4).

THE VERAHRAM PLAIN

We can now consider the fortress of Verahram, located opposite Oğlan Qala on the other side of the Araxes in Azerbaijan (Iran), as an integral part of the system of control and exploitation of this plain. It is the second-largest Urartian fortress (fig. 8) in Iran (Biscione 2012: 86; Zimansky 1985: 23), but notwithstanding its size was built to manage a relatively small agricultural area. The fort was built for the purpose of controlling and exploiting the plain of Sharur located on the other side of Araxes, which had to be crossed by means of a bridge—which is usually dated to Urartian times—located right next to the fortress (Kleiss 1974: 84, fig. 4;

¹⁴ Qiz Qala 1, Qiz Qala 2 and Karasuqala.

Kleiss/Kroll 1979: 221-222, fig. 50).¹⁵ This circumstance makes this the third area controlled by more than one administrative economic centre in the Kingdom of Urartu. Elsewhere, this situation is seen in the plain of Patnos, north of Lake Van, which is controlled by the two great settlements of Aznavurtepe and Kancıklı, and in Yerevan, with the fortresses of Armavir and with Arin-berd, later replaced by Karmir-blur¹⁶.

The fortress of Verahram, an *ex novo* Urartian foundation, is generally dated to the 8th/7th century B.C. (Kroll 1976: 166)¹⁷ and would have been part of the defence system involving the forts of Qal'eh Sarandj¹⁸ and Ilan Qara I,¹⁹ strategically sited 16 km north-west and 14 km south-west of Verahram and visible to the naked eye, as is found in almost every system of fortifications built by the Urartians in the Iranian provinces of East and West Azerbaijan (Kroll 2011: 157).

The importance of Verahram is also demonstrated by its location on the road that ran beside the River Araxes, leading to the plain of Yerevan, from which were easily accessible other plains that were very important during the Urartian epoch, i.e. those of Qara Zia-eddin, Maku and Doğubayazit (Kleiss 1976: 41; Zimansky 1985: 23-24).

¹⁵ The possible presence of bridges built during the Urartian period might be referred to by an inscription on a stele of Argišti II recently discovered near the village of Bulutpınar in Eastern Anatolia (Çavuşoğlu et al. 2010: 42-48).

¹⁶ Although it cannot be shown that the three centres did not operate at the same time, at least for a short period.

¹⁷ Although more recently Kroll has revised this date, leaning more towards to the 7th century B.C. (<http://www.biainili-Urartu.de/Iran/Maku/Maku-gv.html>). The oldest date is often attributed to the association between the fortress and the tomb of Ališar, found intact in 1859, which contained a bronze bell with an inscription of Argišti I (CTU IV B 8-22; Salvini 2012: 39-40). However, it is possible that Verahram was founded in the 7th century B.C., in the rearmost and most defensible position next to the Araxes, perhaps better to cope with the pressure of the Cimmerians, from the east. On the problem of the Cimmerians, see Salvini 1984: 46. On the metalwork from the tomb, see Piotrovskij 1962: 3-7; Piotrovskij 1966: 29, 44-45, 312; Piotrovskij 1967: 36, 82-85; Piotrovskij 1969: 15-16.

¹⁸ Kleiss initially dated the fort to the 7th century B.C., a date based on the architectural features, especially the kind of buttresses used (Kleiss 1975: 57-58). The site was then dated to the 8th/7th century B.C. after study of the pottery and architectural features (Kleiss 1983: 268). For Kroll the fortress is Urartian, but remains substantially non-datable to the precise century of occupation (Kroll 1976: 28).

¹⁹ This fortress is dated to the early stages of Urartian history (8th cent. B.C.) exclusively on the basis of architecture, since no pottery was found (Kleiss/Kroll 1979: 206, 241).

OTHER MIDDLE IRON AGE SITES IN THE SADARAK AND ORDUBAD PLAINS

In the small plain of Sadarak (ca. 4000 ha) a large Middle Iron Age fortress, Sederekqala, has recently been identified. The fort was built in a strategic position, equidistant from Oğlan Qala to the south and Artashat to the north (ca. 30 km in each case), on the road leading towards the plain of Yerevan (Parker et al. 2011: 191, 195-196).

In the plain of Ordubad, a little further to the west along the Araxes, there are a few archaeological sites. These are the fortress of Qal'eh Gavur²⁰, located on the course of the Araxes on the Iranian side, and the cemeteries of Dalmatepe, Muncuklutepe and Mərdangol (fig. 7).

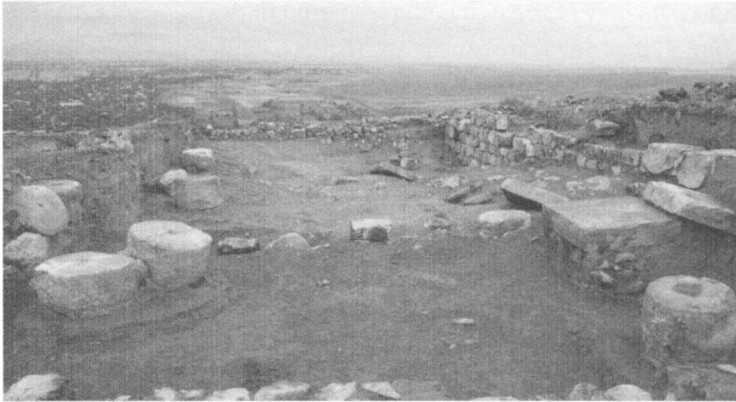


Fig. 9. Oğlan Qala: Column Components from Room 1 (from Ristvet et al. 2012: fig. 12)

The fortress is dated to the Urartian period, particularly the late 7th century B.C., on tenuous architectural and ceramic grounds,²¹ while the burial grounds—not very close to the fortress and probably not connected with it—all have a Middle Iron Age phase.

To date, it is not known with certainty whether the area was under Urartian control, especially because of the uncertain date of the Qal'eh Gavur fortress; it is possible that it stood on the road that led from the plain of Marand to the Araxes nearby; in any case Qal'eh Gavur is about 30 km from Qal'eh Gauar, a fortress that has been dated to the 7th century B.C. (Kleiss 1983: 283).

²⁰ Also known as Qal'eh Gavur near the Araxes or near Marand, not to be confused with the homonymous Qal'eh Gavur near Khoy.

²¹ Although there may be actually remains of Urartian pottery (Kroll 1976: 74-75, 168).

THE ACHAEMENID PRESENCE IN NAKHCHIVAN

As is now well attested in a number of regions that were certainly part of the Empire, the impact of the Achaemenids is clearly more discernible at the top of the social pyramid rather than at its base. In fact, the continuation of regional material culture and the parallel lack of Achaemenid influence on this is found in almost all domains of the empire. As indicators of this period we have groups of luxury objects that can be traced back to the court (zoomorphic *rhyta* or bracelets with animal protomes), even in their local versions (Knauss 2001: 126).

Over the past few years, Florian Knauss has reviewed the current state of the archaeology of the Achaemenid period in the Caucasus. The scholar has shown that in Transcaucasian regions, and especially in Georgia (Gumbati, Samadlo, Zikhia-Gora) and Azerbaijan Republic (Sari Tepe, Qaracamirli, Kara Tepe) (Knauss 2005: 197-220; Knauss 2006: 79-118; Knauss et al. 2010: 111-121), the impact of the Persian presence is evident, both in luxury items and in some residences, clearly inspired by experience of Persepolis, whose influence may be seen in the use of highly sophisticated column bases and the residential—rather than defensive—character of the buildings. Knauss attributes this phenomenon, which is unique among the outlying territories of the empire, to the absence of strong and important indigenous traditions at the time they were occupied.

Basically, the most solid archaeological evidence for this period in Nakhchivan is to be found once again in Oğlan Qala. A presumed late Achaemenid period occupation is that of Period III, when the Urartian era structures underwent major rebuilding (Ristvet et al. 2012: 335); in particular, the large Room 1 of Period IV (Urartian) was enlarged and transformed into a pillared hall measuring 27 x 23 metres. The work was clearly not finished; a total of 29 column components were found: two bases, a capital, a torus, five plinths and twenty drums (fig. 9-10) (Ristvet et al. 2012: 336-337).

These elements, all in an unfinished state, clearly resemble similar pieces found at Sari Tepe, Qaracamirli, Gumbati and Benjamin (Ristvet et al. 2012: 337). The condition of these architectural elements, however, does not allow their certain attribution to Achaemenid craftsmen. The presence of stone column drums, which are believed to be attested in the

Achaemenid era only in imperial capitals, might suggest a later date for the structure, probably during the Hellenistic era²²; it might be attributable to some local potentate who took over a few centuries after the power vacuum left at the end of the Urartian domination of the area.

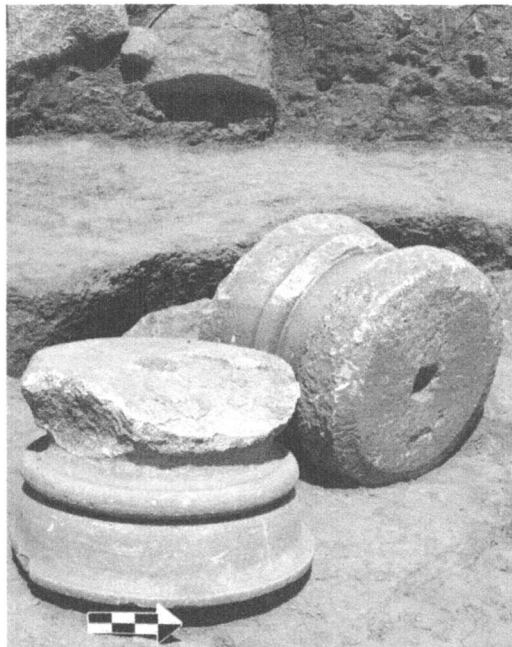


Fig. 10. Oğlan Qala: Column Bases (from Ristvet et al. 2012: 338, fig. 13)

In conclusion, the archaeological and epigraphic data, taken together with the undoubted strategic²³ importance of the region, located at the intersection of several communication routes between the regions of north-western Iran, Lake Sevan and the foothills of Mount Ararat, make it reasonable to assume a fairly stable Urartian occupation of the area, that may be placed chronologically in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.. The Urartian settlement system was characterised by a hierarchical network of fortifications centred on the great fortress of Oğlan Qala, the most important

²² The Period III pottery, a mixture of Achaemenid types and local forms, does not help to clarify the chronological situation (Ristvet et al. 2012: 337-339, 357).

²³ In addition to the routes already cited, we must remember that the whole area was rich in mineral deposits, in particular iron and tin, but also gold, silver, copper and lead (Belli/Sevin 1999: 65-66).

regional settlement, while for the period immediately following, there is at present no clear evidence of Persian occupation of the region.

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